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Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00
PA-01 USIA-06 SP-02 /030 W
----------028569 092327Z /66
R 081537Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2558

C O N F I D E N T I A L ACCRA 1873

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, GH
SUBJ: ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER STANDS FAST

1. SUMMARY: ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER SAYS HE WILL RESIST PRESSURES TO RIG FORTHCOMING REFERENDUM. EMBASSY THINKS HE IS SINCERE BUT RIGGING ELECTIONS IS A WELL-DEVELOPED ART IN GHANA AND HE MAY CONCEIVABLY BE OUTMANEUVERED. END SUMMARY.

2. POLOFF CALLED ON ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER JUSTICE I.K. ABBAN MARCH 7 TO RENEW CONTACT BEFORE MARCH 30 REFERENDUM ON UNION GOVERNMENT AND TO CHECK OUT REPORTS THAT ABBAN HAD BEEN SENT ON INDEFINITE LEAVE BECAUSE HE REFUSED TO HELP RIG REFERENDUM.

3. ABBAN ADMITTED WITH A SMILE THAT HE HAD ALSO HEARD RUMORS HE WAS TO BE PUT OUT TO PASTURE BUT SAID THAT THERE WAS NO TRUTH TO THEM. HE PLANS TO STAY ON AND DO HIS JOB; HE SAID HE WOULD RESIGN BEFORE ALLOWING ANY IRREGULARITIES IN REFERENDUM. ASKED WHETHER PRESSURES HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO BEAR ON HIM TO MAKE SURE UNION GOVERNMENT IS ENDORSED ON MARCH 30, HE INDICATED THAT THIS IS INDEED THE CASE. HOWEVER, HE STATED FIRMLY, HE PLANS TO STAND FAST AGAINST PRESSURES AND WILL DO ALL HE CAN TO KEEP REFERENDUM HONEST.

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4. REVIEWING DETAILED PROCEDURES GOVERNING BALLOTING, ABBAN SAID THAT IF THEY ARE FOLLOWED CORRECTLY IT WILL BE NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO RIG REFERENDUM. ASKED IF THUGS FROM PEACE AND SOLIDARITY COUNCIL OR FROM OTHER PRO-UNION GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS MAY TRY TO INTIMIDATE VOTERS, ABBAN ADMITTED THIS IS ALWAYS A POSSIBILITY BUT OBSERVED THAT RETURNS FROM GIVEN POLLING PLACES CAN BE INVALIDATED

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IF REGULATIONS ARE VIOLATED, D.G. BY THREAT OR USE OF FORCE. RECALLING TIME, EFFORT AND FOREIGN EXCHANGE (FOR PURCHASE OF NEW VW TRUCKS FOR ELECTORAL COMMISSION) WHICH HAVE GONE INTO PREPARATIONS FOR REFERENDUM, ABBAN SAID IT WOULD BE A GREAT SHAME AND A GREAT WASTE IF IT WERE CONDUCTED DISHONESTLY. HE EXPRESSED A GUARDED CONFIDENCE THAT ALL WOULD GO WELL.

5. COMMENT: ABBAN IS REPUTED TO BE A MAN OF GREAT INTEGRITY AND CONSIDERABLY ABILITY, TRAITS WHICH WERE CLEARLY EVIDENT DURING THIS INTERVIEW. ABOUT 44 YEARS OLD, HE WAS A HIGH COURT JUDGE FROM 1970 UNTIL MID-1977 WHEN HE WAS NAMED ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER. HE SEEMS DEDICATED TO KEEPING REFERENDUM ABOVE BOARD, BUT RIGGING ELECTIONS IS A WELL-DEVELOPED ART IN GHANA AND HIS SINCERITY MAY BE NO MATCH FOR THE WILES OF PRO-UNION GOVERNMENT FORCES.
SMITH

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLICIES, ELECTIONS, FRAUDS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978ACCRA01873
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780107-0071
Format: TEL
From: ACCRA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780395/aaaadcgs.tel
Line Count: 79
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 02d997cb-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3410532
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ELECTORAL COMMISSIONER STANDS FAST
TAGS: PGOV, GH
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/02d997cb-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
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